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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA VETERANS MUST WAIT MONTHS FOR DISABILITY BENEFITS

Washington, D.C. — Today Rep. Henry A. Waxman released a new report finding that thousands of disabled veterans in Southern California wait months before receiving veteran's disability benefits.

The report, conducted at the request of Rep. Waxman by the minority staff of the House Committee on Government Reform, is based upon information obtained from the VA. It finds that:

- Almost 10,000 veterans are waiting for disability assessments at the regional VA center in Los Angeles. Veterans cannot receive benefits until these assessments are completed.
- In the last year, the number of veterans on the waiting list for a disability assessment has increased by over 2,500. The number of veterans waiting six months or more has more than doubled.
- Veterans in Southern California must wait an average of 205 days before their assessments are completed, well above the national average and almost twice as long as the VA's stated goal. These long waits result in tens of millions of dollars in delayed payment of benefits to Southern California veterans.

“Our troops are risking their lives everyday in Iraq,” said Rep. Waxman. “Yet disabled veterans are being badly neglected by the Bush Administration when they return. It's shameful to leave disabled veterans in bureaucratic limbo for months on end.”

In its most recent budget proposal, the Bush Administration proposed cutting hundreds of positions from the Veterans Benefits Administration, the VA office that handles disability assessments. Veterans groups have indicated that VA funding levels currently under discussion in the Republican-controlled Congress “will have a devastating impact on the VA's ability to deliver timely services.”

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“Local VA officials are doing their best to provide care for veterans. But there is only so much they can do in the face of continued inadequate funding under the Bush Administration,” said Rep. Waxman.

The complete study is posted on the web at www.democrats.reform.house.gov.